Trish: A Romance

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I.
The story starts here: PAFA
has its yearly opening, and I
explore it with Lisa. I am
looking for Trish's paintings:
she has invited me. She is no
where in sight. There: it's her
self-portrait on the wall, called
The Vessel. Sepia, brown, colors
that have Spanish resonance.
Trish's in blue, half-profiled,
wearing an expression of pensive
angst. She stares at me from
the painting, pensively apart,
peremptory. Suddenly, & under my skin.

Our first date: Lisa still
in the dark. An operation I
enact covertly. We are going
to see a movie: *Amelie*. She is
merely cute. I sit through this
for you, Trish. I dialogue with
Bukowski while I sit there*: I
deserve a blowjob for this*. Hank
is amused but reticent. Trish
wears a green winter hat which
now sits on her lap. Her hair
is pony-tailed. She has had a
salad at Cosi. I am hungry, I
enjoy my hunger: suffered for her.

Back at my place: 21st and Race.
I play Trish Sweet and Dandy
from *The Harder They Come*. She
dances without restraint on the
tan carpeted floor. Something is
becoming loose in us. Then she
lays down on my floor, in blue as
in *The Vessel*, and lets me paw at
her. Skyrocketing giddiness over
takes us. We are drinking grog
(rum and water) from capacious
blue mugs, each other's new toy.
Look: I have, in my pocket, a
fire-red copy of Aleister Crowley. *Do what thou wilt*.

I am in an artist's studio: winter,
long broad windows, sunset, it's
going down. I am in a wife-beater
with braces, mustachioed, jack-in-
the-box. There is a portrait of
Apollo on the wall: nude, in a
field of purples and blues. He
carries a fiddle. Trish and I are
drinking cheap red wine. There
is no one else (it seems) in the
building. Pipes drone steadily.
Warmed by the wine, we sneak
into a dark bathroom. I crash
through several floors of myself.

Pull-out couch: we are down for
the count. I have my hands on her
sex. She is shushing me. I make no
noise. There is no sleep here. The
windows represent being into a
new space. Morning: we will walk
back to my 'hood. We will eat at
my diner. I will feel, on Cherry
Street, that I have never flown
this fast around the universe. I
will be all the worse for being
happy (Lisa). Pancakes do
not taste as they ever have
before: ambrosial, tokens of flames.

Phone message: "the first kiss
of love." Now I cannot avoid
telling Lisa. She takes it on
the face but not without a fight.
Word has spread around the store.
I wake up to find myself a book-
store Byron. Trish wavers. She
aims to please everyone. She says
she doesn't know. Then, there is
another *arriviste*. He is
older. He dives headfirst into
paint, but without painting. I
have no defense against this
first onslaught, I hold tight, lost.

II.
First night at my place: I
am able to have Trish to
look at up close. I notice
how different she is from
Lisa: long, lean torso,
tiny breasts, narrow waist,
flaxen straight hair that
reaches down her back.
She loves me wildly and
with feeling. "Hair upon the
pillow like a sleepy golden
storm," Trish slept late. Yet
she was out as soon as she
was in; "I'm with Roger again,"

she said, and pulled the plug. There
was a period in which we could
not talk to each other. I either
had to have her totally or not
at all. There would be no grey
for us. Was this karma for the
manner in which I treated
Lisa? Closing shift: Roger came
to pick up Trish. I heaved against
the glass doors before the manager
came to let us out. Romantic poems
were being written, informed by a
kind of desperation. I read Donne
for a Penn class and extrapolated

his stance (metaphysics abridging
Romanticism) and remembered
that first night, in which Trish
and I read *The Ecstasy* to each
other. Now, she hoarded her body
where I could not see. *I have my
own concerns*, I thought to myself,
walking home from Bennett Hall in rain.
Spring rains; Trish returns. She
seems chastened. There is a part
of her that needs me. It is a part
of her that she rebels against, so
that her manner towards me takes
the form of an interior war made

exterior. My folks take us to the
Pink Rose bakery on Bainbridge
Street, and Trish and I share a
big brownie. We explore the Eyes
Gallery on South Street and my
folks learn Trish's eye, tastes.
There is a loaded sky bearing
down on us: Trish's eyes water.
We are to spend the night at Trish's
place. She lives with a handful of
artists at 4325 Baltimore Ave.
James, there, is bi-polar, always causing
problems. Trish is turned on by him
but pretends not to be. Her room is

uncarpeted, wooden slat floors, big
wooden dresser, overlooking a quaint
West Philly courtyard. There is a cat
named Zooska, a preternaturally
intelligent girl-cat that plays with us.
For some reason we do not make
love that night, and when I wake up
I am fit to burst. I send red signals.
Trish's compassion overtakes her: I
loosen, getting sucked off. Her glasses
remain on. She is doing this because
she loves me, and love-waves are
communicated in oral gestures. She
means it. I can sense James

in the courtyard, listening. Will Trish
close around me at the right moment,
or will she miss? As I go off the edge,
I feel her miss slightly and then hit,
and I have left the planet. She is so
far beneath me that there is no seeing
her. She swallows me, and I will never
leave her mouth again. It is sealed.

III.
It happened again: Trish found
someone to replace me with.
She broke the news over the
phone. I betrayed no emotion.
Why was this happening? I
felt I had already repaid my
karmic debt of suffering to
Lisa: this was overtime.
This dude was a concierge at
a fancy hotel: "Byronic," Trish
said (the first Byronic concierge
ever, I thought). Trish insisted
on telling me the story, and it
was sordid, drunken, dumb.

They met through a mutual
friend at a bar. This concierge
made a blatant play for her and
she accepted it. They stumbled
drunkenly to his apartment and
slept together. At that point they
made a pact not to sleep with any-
one else for the time being. They
were saving each other from what
they were already doing. I found
the whole thing incoherent and
lame: why did Trish need to be
"saved" from me? Why was this
guy so eager to make a pact?

Silent mode: I had Trish like a
disease, but it helped not to talk
to her. I needed to be cured of
her just like she did of me. One
day I had an appointment in
Manayunk, and I met a woman
on the R6 train. She was a tall
brunette, medium build, with
black eyes and freckles. I was
wearing my Shelley shirt ("I am
as wayward as Shelley") and
that started the ball rolling. She
was lively, easy to talk to. We
made a date to meet soon after.

Franklin Institute steps: there she
sat, in a long sleeveless dress that
was tie-dyed, and had earth-tones
of "hippie" all over it. We are at
my apartment. Her legs fall into
my lap. We are naked. We feed
on each other in the summer
heat, as the sun goes down. That's
it, past this: I am cured. I can go after Trish
again because I do not need to. I
can want Trish again because I do
not want her too much. Flesh equals flesh.
Somehow Trish is open: we make
plans to see a movie. I do not ask

about the concierge: she offers no
information. When she arrives at
my pad (I help her out of a red cab)
she is either drunk or stoned, or
both. She is in a frilly white skirt,
hair bunned, languid, droopy eyelids.
My body reacts: now is the time I
must claim her. She must be taken.
I touch her in a hesitant way and
she pulls me on top of her (living
room floor, lights on, sun setting,
skirt hitched, shirts on, tan carpet).
For once: I worry not about pleasing
her. I need to place myself in her as

quickly as possible, release. I do so with a
huge sense of triumph. She is my
animal bride and we have just been
married. She tells me she is cheating
on the concierge, but there is no
remorse in her voice. It is the voice
of one possessed. Interposition will
not happen again. The only flesh that
need be equaled is mine to hers. So:
the marriage begins. Yet I live in fear: at
any moment the rug can be pulled
from beneath me. Am I replaceable?

IV.
How we establish ourselves: every
night is spent together. I prefer to
spend as many nights as possible in
West Philly, where rugged old houses
sport ample foliage that is ripe with
the flush of late August. We make
love at least once a night, so
we can be fully animal and happily
married. Green herb follows us
around as a mode of relaxation and
to get our moods in sync. Trish is
developing my palette: I taste pesto
for the first time, vegetarian stews.

At 4325, there is a party all the time,
and it is like finding an adolescence that
I never had. Jackie was another painter
who lived on the ground floor (Trish's
room was upstairs.) Trish and Jackie had
fooled around and Jackie painted in a far
more violent manner than Trish (lots of
smears, grays, blacks, more abstraction),
but he was a farm kid from Carolina and
a gentle soul. His girlfriend Grace was
from a well-connected Connecticut
family and knew J.D. Salinger personally.
She had a bit of an attitude, and her
lips were often curled in a sneer.

The rest of the 4325 crew were rock
and rollers and into doing Ritalin
lines. By October I am an honorary
member of the household. At that
time I was recording an album of
spoken-word stuff in South Philly.
I would zoom on a trolley up to
West Philly and that night there
was a party. The kitchen had
awful yellow wallpaper and a
blazingly bright light and I did
shots there with Jackie. I wasn't
a big drinker but that night Trish
both went to town, and got rowdy.

Trish and I adjourn to her bedroom
and have loud, drunken sex with the
door wide open. Her diaphragm got
stuck but we just kept going. Later
we heard another couple hooking
up down the hall. The air was mild
and clean and it was warm for October
and there was no way we could go to
bed. We staggered down to the front
porch and sat on the forest-green
swing-bench that was held up
against Jackie's window. Branches
hung between us and the street.
Leaves were falling in Clark Park.

That night was one peak of 4325.
There were many. We began to
develop our rituals beyond just
pot, food, and sex. I always
cherished the walk from Penn
(where I was finishing my
degree) to 4325. At 40th and
Spruce was the University
Pinball Arcade, which I liked
to call the Universal Pinball
Arcade, but neither of us ever
went in. We also liked to walk
late up to Fresh Grocer at
40th and Walnut. We'd buy

French bread, because on pot
there is nothing better. We were
also spending lots of time with
Tobi, who at that point was
Trish's best friend. She was
another painter, less into
mythology and more into
precisely detailed figuration.
Tobi was tiny, with exquisite
cheekbones, bright blue eyes,
wavy chestnut hair, thick bow-
shaped lips. She was hilarious
but turbulent, and wont to cause
scenes. There were to be lots. I loved her too.

One night Trish and Tobi came
with me to the studio in South
Philly where I was recording. We
drank Paisano (cheap red wine)
and listened to the recordings.
Tobi wanted us to walk her
home, but she was on her bike
and it was completely out of
our way. She was drunk and
upset and started yelling and
abruptly left. Trish and Tobi
tended to mirror each other
and so I wasn't surprised that
Trish also started to freak out.

Trish ran into moving traffic
on 18th and Walnut (right by
B & N where we worked),
and I had to drag her back to
the sidewalk. Then she attempted
to strangle me when we had
almost reached my pad on 21st
Street. I managed to tear her
off, but it was my first inkling
that being Trish's established
husband could be onerous.
For the first time that night,
I went to bed tired in a bad
way. This wouldn't be all roses. Reds, with blues.

V.
Still: fertilized, loved, I began
to write deeply again. Yet
I remembered what came
to seem like a curse: the
fear that I would not be
heard. Was I in the wrong
place at the wrong time?
So I spiraled into depression,
even as pieces tumbled out.
Midnight Blues, a dirge
in odal form, was the best,
written during witching
hour, snow coming down,
Trish dead asleep in bed.

At one point I even began
to consider suicide: I had
given so much time to my
art, why was I being
held back? How could I
live under a confining
curse? Trish is my lover
but not very good at
comforting me: she is too
lost in her own blues. Too
many colors swirl around
her head, she is lost to
images, tints, hues, shades.
Wood creaks beneath us.

By X-Mas our mood lifts.
My folks take us to dinner
in a Vietnamese restaurant,
and we order pad thai for
the first time. Trish for me
means new tastes and the
color of these noodles is
matched to her hair that
is grown out, no longer
bunned. We are near
home in West Philly
and West Philly does
begin to feel like home.
No sharp pangs linger, our bodies shared.

New Years there's a party:
Tobi giggles over Indian
food that we have delivered,
everything is voluptuous
luxury. I jam with Matt from
Eris in the music room (Josh's
bedroom) on Velvets tunes,
read the new pieces for Jackie
who says "groovy." Trish is a
bright fish swimming in a
school, green waters around
us. We are two fish together
and we are ripped to the gills
and the floor is soft coral.

Trish is unhappy: parties are
starting to wear on her. By
February she moves into a
new pad in a rugged old
brown brick building, also
in West Philly, with Tobi.
The doors to Trish's bed-
room are glass, not very
substantial, so Tobi has to
listen to us make love all
the time (a night with no
love would be unworthy
of us). I love the view from
Trish's windows: placid

looking 42nd Street, trees,
large houses, it could pass
for suburbia. It reminded
me, also, of the England I
have always imagined, the
ideal England which gave
rise to so many early heroes
of mine, and which once
produced giants of the written
word. I would look out the
window, pretend we were
in England after Trish had
gone to sleep, and if Tobi
were out or in her room, where I wanted into, too.

VI.
Tobi begins to reveal her character. Her
painting style is not unlike Mary's— she's
a formalist. But Tobi has no taste for
mythology and loves quotidian objects,
dyke scenes. She paints with absolute
precision and commitment. Her personality
in life belies this— she has two frequent
faces, both of which are constantly bubbling
over onto the surface (Trish is reserved
in comparison, and a secret voluptuary).
Her moods dictate either kitchen-sink
humor or paranoid rage. Her tininess
often necessitates loudness. By this time
she has put on a good amount of

weight as well, so that her exquisite
cheekbones and startling eyes are offset
in a fulsome way. As is visible, Tobi
is jealous of Trish on a number of levels—
Trish has looks, academic distinction, and
me, while Tobi scurries among potential
lovers, never able to appease her conscience
and settle on anyone. Between that and
our amatory antics, Tobi becomes unsettled
with us. When Tobi throws little parties,
I act bullish— partly because I'm stoned,
partly because I feel a manly sense
of owning Trish and Tob. But when
I leave, Trish and Tob get in big fights.

Happier now are times when Trish
stays with me. Trish still enjoys
experimenting with chemicals, and when
she does, I oversee her. But our routines
are not that different than anyone else's.
We makes plans to visit Montreal at the end
of the summer. By the time we get to
Montreal, I realize that letting Trish
plan the whole thing herself was a bad
idea. We're trapped in a closet on Saint
Catherine Street. It's hot. But I put on
a game face and we see the sights. Trish's
tremendous breakdown has been documented
elsewhere. Suffice it to say it was a tense

time. Something began to break between us. Trish's freak-outs were spaced about a week apart, and were regular. It became more and more difficult to find energy with which to cope. I was burned out on her sexually as well. I dreaded having to make love to her. I was repulsed. After a certain point, I couldn't take the strain of dealing with her any longer. In late November, I broke off with her in such a way as to suggest that I needed to be harsh. I did. Her fits had taken something from me that would take some time to repair. They imposed soul damage.

I had learned that Tobi liked to bounce around. About a year after I split with Trish for the first time, I had occasion (finally) to know Tob the way I'd always wanted to. I was upstairs at the Khyber, doing my rounds (I was in charge of an arts collective, the Philly Free School, at the time), and Tob was there with her girl posse. Me and Tob were dancing and we started grinding. It was intense and pleasurable and it had been building for a long time. I took her home and knew a few things at once— this wouldn't last, wouldn't be a

marriage, and it might not even be pretty (Tobi's paranoia never being far beneath the surface). We had traveled the length of Center City and were cold, so I drew a bath. What happened in the bath and afterwards in bed was half-terrible, half-great. It was done, for both of us, just to have done it. I couldn't say, then or now, that I regretted it. But Trish was still around, had taken up with a new guy, and though I wasn't jealous (I had many lovers at the time) I still loved her. I didn't know if the story was over or not— turns out it wasn't.

VII.
All through intervening years, Trish
never fully left my mind. Many
encounters I lived through were
pointless— one-night stands, flings,
some felt, some not felt at all.
When Trish reentered my life, she
did so directly. Simply, we wanted
each other again. Trish now lived in
an apartment building, with roommates,
on 49th off of Baltimore. The apartment
had a fire escape large enough on which
to sit, and smoke. I was in the process
of beginning to publish seriously, and would
often devise new strategies as I stared

off over the clotheslines and windows.
We were older, less demonstrative— but
we still made love almost every night.
The problem was, this was interspersed with
consumption of cannabis. I am soon to
learn (again) that mutual intoxication cuts off
intimacy. What used to be sparks between
us were now ashes. There were even times
when the "little death" was a bore. So that
for six months we're in a holding pattern.
This time, it's Trish's turn to do a sudden
break. Moreover, she has an older man
waiting in the background. I see them
together in Rittenhouse Square. I'm numb;

I believe (as is the case) that Trish
is now mostly frigid. She uses her sex to
ensnare and bind. But making love to
a semi-frigid woman does eventually wear
thin. Still, my attitude is that Trish
and I could still work something out.
This time, Trish never gives me a reason.
The next summer there's a fresh confrontation—
Trish is very wary, and I'm more
perfunctory than I seem to be. We're
buried in each other as something to
express. This time, I eventually realize,
Trish is gone for good. But I make
a conscious decision to still love her, and Tob.

When I look back on the time
I spent with Trish, it occurs to me
that we never knew each other that
well. We were "mad for it," the passion,
the romance, without being mad for
each other, exactly. What's worth exploring is
what I know about her now. Like
this— that her aims were more strategic,
less organic, than mine. She wanted
to take me and mold me, and I
wouldn't let her. But this was
buried beneath other imperatives. She
wasn't strong enough to enforce her
strategies and I was too wild to tame.

The pressing question that follows is—
was it worth it? I'd say it was,
though it could've ended in two (or three)
corpses. We participated in these scenes
at a time during which there was little
surface-level romance in America. Bohemian
America had never been a particularly
well-populated locale, but we set up
camp there and in the process confounded
structures that we could've let crush us.
Our dreams weren't especially original,
but our improvisations created a new
context for them. Neither of us came out
of Bohemia— it was a new realm for us.

Is it only because I can still sit
here, writing these lines, that our
escapades still seem like good ideas?
If we did end up corpses, who would
be the wiser? On this account, I
have no solid answers. I can only
say that for some reason, some humans
need the charm, the sparkle, the electricity
of romance, and will put their lives
on the line to attain it. So it was for
us. Those that are kith and kin to us
will understand. Those that aren't may
choose to laugh at our foolishness. But
it must be dry, accursed laughter to us…

F

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